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ABSTRACT

The research described in this paper was designed to assess the attitudes of male college students toward feminism, to analyze possible relationships between these attitudes and certain demographic characteristics of the family of origin, and to determine whether such attitudes affect the structuring of social stimuli. It was hypothesized that (1) male college students whose mothers were employed while the young men were in high school would have more positive attitudes toward feminism than those whose mothers were not employed, and (2) male college students who had highly positive attitudes toward feminism would demonstrate a different structuring of social stimuli presented to them in a projective test than would males with opposing attitudes. The study utilized a projective test in which each of 165 participants received a set of pictures of women engaged in a variety of activities. Participants were requested to write stories in response to standard TAT questions printed under each picture. The content of each story was rated feminist/non-feminist, and coded in terms of affect, traditional/nontraditional attitudes, and correct gender perception. It was found that sons of women employed in full time professional positions are most likely to develop attitudes favorable to feminism, particularly as they grow older. (Author/GC)

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DISCUSSION PAPER SERIES

MALE ATTITUDES TOWARD FEMINISM: POSSIBLE ANTECEDENTS AND CONSEQUENCES

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This research was designed to assess the attitudes of male college students toward feminism, to analyze possible relationships between these attitudes and certain demographic characteristics of the families of origin, and to determine whether such attitudes affect the structuring of social stimuli. These data were gathered as part of a larger study of women's attitudes toward feminism (Green, 1978).[1]

A good deal of research effort has been directed at the effects of maternal employment on various aspects of child development. Hoffman, in reviews of this research (1974,1979), noted that the effects of maternal employment for school age girls have generally been found to be favorable. Daughters of working mothers have been found, in contrast to daughters of non-working mothers, to have more admiration for their mothers, to value the female role more highly, and to have higher self esteem.

The consequences of maternal employment for boys, however, are not so clear-cut, and social class has been found to be a mediating variable. Sons of middle class working mothers have been found to have less stereotyped views of females and males and to be more androgynous than those of non-working mothers. There is also evidence that they score lower on some cognitive indices and may not achieve as much academically as sons of non-working mothers.

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[1]The author thanks Dr. Pearl Green of the Department of Sociology, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, for the use of these data.

Other research has shown more positive effects. Adolescent boys whose mothers worked were found to have better personal and social adjustment and consequently more positive interpersonal relationships both at home and at school (reported by Hoffman, 1979). Derdiarian and Stipper (1979) studied a select sample of boys from intact families categorized in the highest group on Hollingshead's two-factor index of SES. Comparisons between boys whose mothers were employed and those who were not demonstrated the former to be more accepting of women's success, less traditional in their attitudes toward women, and to score higher on femininity on the Bem Sex Role Inventory.

The effects of maternal employment on working class sons, on the other hand, has been found to be related to a strained relationship with the father in cases where he is perceived by the son to be a failure. In addition, the reduction in sex role stereotyping is not as great for these boys as for those of the middle class.

For middle class elementary and secondary-school males, however, it appears that maternal employment is associated with more positive attitudes toward women. These mothers provide a different kind of role model from that of the non-working mother, one which demonstrates successful interaction and coping with the world outside the home. The attitudes of the fathers in families in which the mothers are employed should not be overlooked in assessing the variables associated with this finding. Such fathers can be assumed perhaps to have less traditional attitudes toward women's roles and toward division of household responsibilities, and may be providing role models different from those of fathers whose wives are not employed outside the home. These speculations are supported by the work of Gold and Andres (1978), who studied 10-year-old children and their parents and found that when mothers were employed the parents reported that they behaved more similarly in domestic activities; fathers were more involved in household functions and child supervision than were the fathers whose wives were not employed.

The present research was designed in part to investigate the relationship between maternal employment, as well as other family characteristics, and attitudes toward feminism among predominantly middle class male college students living away from home.

The research was directed also at investigating the possibility that attitudes toward feminism may serve as highly salient "cognitive schema" for certain persons in their constructions of social reality (Berger and Luchmann, 1967). Sandra Bem (1978) suggested that individuals may process their experience in terms of cognitive schema which are particularly salient for them, and further, that gender may be highly salient schema for some people. Such persons would make attributions to other persons of intentions and characteristics in terms of their own individual views of sex roles. It seemed reasonable to speculate that gender might be such cognitive schema for male college students who represented the opposite ends of a continuum on attitudes toward feminism. If this were true, constructions of social reality could be expected to show differences between the groups when gender was part of a stimulus.

To the author's knowledge, no research has addressed the question of how attitudes toward feminism may influence men's construction of social reality. This research makes a preliminary step in this direction, employing a thematic apperception technique to assess such construction.

In summary, the research was designed to investigate the following hypotheses:

1) male college students whose mothers were employed while they were in high school would have more positive attitudes toward feminism than those whose mothers were not employed.

2) male college students who had highly positive attitudes toward feminism would demonstrate a different structuring of social stimuli presented to them in a projective test than would males with opposing attitudes.

Procedure

Participants

The sample consisted of 165 male students who were present on the days the instruments were administered in 36 undergraduate classes at California State University, Chico. The courses represented a broad range of subjects in the humanities and social sciences, and participants reported majors in many different areas.

Instruments

The instruments were administered in the same order to all participants as follows.

Projective test. Fourteen pictures were drawn for the larger study which represented women engaged in traditional role activities and in non-traditional activities. Each participant received a set of five randomly selected pictures which were reproduced on 8 1/2 x 13" paper with standard TAT questions printed under each (McClelland, 1953). Participants were requested to write stories in response to the questions and to fill the lines provided on the paper. The procedure was timed to allow five minutes for each story.

For purposes of this analysis, two pictures each were selected from the traditional and non-traditional sets, as follows:

Traditional:

1) a woman talking on the telephone

2) a woman standing beside a conference table at which several men are seated

Non-traditional:

1) a female judge presiding at the bench with a man standing in front of it

2) a woman operating a printing press

The content of each story was rated feminist/non-feminist on a 5-point scale. In addition, each story was coded on one dimension suggested by the picture which

it was believed would indicate differential perceptions by feminist and non-feminist males. The dimensions for each picture were as follows:

1. stories about the woman on the phone were categorized as to the positive or negative affect of her conversation
2. stories about the conference room were categorized in terms of whether or not they expressed traditional sex roles
3. stories about the judge were categorized in terms of whether or not negative affect was expressed toward her
4. stories about the printer were categorized in terms of whether she was perceived to be female or male. Inspection of the data revealed that although the figure was drawn as a female, it was sometimes misperceived.

The coding was done by one of the two coders who had coded the stories written by the female participants in the larger study (Green, 1978). Interjudge agreement on feminist content of stories for those data was .85. The coding system for the larger study was more complex than that used in this analysis, and interjudge reliability for that system was .91. Consequently, the use of one experienced coder for the male participants' stories was considered to be a satisfactory procedure.

Attitudes toward feminism. Acker's (1973) Roles of Women scale was the instrument used to assess attitudes toward feminism. Males were instructed to omit any items which did not apply to them, and the final attitude scores were based on 20 items to which all of the participants responded.

Demographic information. Participants supplied information about their age, major, year in college, fathers' education and employment, mothers' education, present employment and employment during their high school years.

Results

Antecedents

For analysis, the 40 participants scoring lowest on the feminist scale were identified and labeled "non-feminist". The 40 participants scoring highest were categorized "pro-feminist". The possible range of attitude scores was 20 to 100; the mean score for non-feminists was 49.5, and that for pro-feminists was 75.1.

Mothers' employment was significantly related to attitude toward feminism, as shown in Table 1. It can be seen, however, that the hypothesis was supported only in part; approximately half of the mothers of both non-feminists and pro-feminists did not work outside the home while their sons were in high school. The difference is found in the fact that more of the pro-feminist males' mothers worked full-time than part-time, and the reverse was true for non-feminist males' mothers.

Table 2 shows the type of job held by mothers for each group. Significantly more mothers of pro-feminist males held professional employment than mothers of non-feminist males, and the latter mothers more frequently held clerical positions than did the pro-feminist males' mothers.

None of the other variables analyzed, i.e., fathers' and mothers' education and fathers' job, was found to be related to attitudes toward feminism.

An additional finding was that of a difference between the mean ages of the two groups significant at the .001 level ($t = -4.10$, $df = 78$). Pro-feminist men were older on the average than non-feminist men (23.2 years versus 20.6 years). The mean age of the men in the two middle quartiles was 22.0 years.

Consequences

Spearman correlation coefficients were computed to determine the relationship between attitudes toward feminism as measured by the paper and pencil test

Table 1

Mothers' Employment During Respondents' High School by Non- and Pro-Feminist Males

Mothers' Employment	Non-Feminist (N=40)	Pro-Feminist (N=40)
None	22	21
Part-time	12	4
Full-time	6	15

$\chi^2 = 7.88$, df = 2, $p < .02$

Table 2

Mothers' Jobs during Respondents' High School by Non- and Pro-Feminist Males

Mothers' Jobs	Non-Feminist (N=40)	Pro-Feminist N=40)
Professional	3	9
Clerical	15	8
Services	0	2
Total	18	19

$\chi^2 = 7.11$, df = 2, $p < .03$

and rated feminist content of the stories by non- and pro-feminist participants. These coefficients are shown in Table 3. Strong, significant correlations were found for two of the pictures, those of the printer and the conference room. Table 4 shows the mean feminist content score for each picture for the non- and pro-feminist groups. It can be seen that statistically significant differences were found between the groups for the same two pictures. It should be noted also that, with the exception of pro-feminists' stories about the conference room, all of the mean scores were in the direction of non-feminist (i.e., < 3.00).

Stories for each picture were also coded on one other dimension. Both the picture of the judge and the woman on the telephone were coded for negative affect toward the woman, and no significant differences between groups were found for either picture. It is of interest to note that it was originally planned to code the telephone picture in terms of the sex of the person on the other end of the line. This was abandoned, however, when inspection of the data revealed that all of the stories written by both non- and pro-feminists assumed that the woman was talking to a man. This picture also elicited the lowest overall mean feminist content rating ($\overline{X}$ = 2.05).

The dimension selected for coding the picture of the woman operating the printing press also emerged as a result of inspection of the data. Although the artist was instructed to draw a woman, and her perception that she had drawn a woman was shared by the researchers, the figure was often perceived as male. It was predicted that this misperception would occur more frequently among non-feminists than among pro-feminists, and this was supported by analysis of the data; the Chi-square was significant at the .04 level (χ^2 = 6.57, df = 2).

Stories elicited by the conference room picture were coded in terms of whether or not the woman was cast in a traditional sex role (e.g., the secretary taking orders for coffee, vs. the chair of the board giving directives). It was expected that non-feminists would attribute more traditional roles to the woman,

Table 3

Correlations Between Attitude Toward Feminism and Feminist Content of Stories for Non- and Pro-Feminist Males

Picture	Rho	p	N	Mean Content Score*
Female Judge	.18	.17	32	2.53
Printer	.41	.024	24	2.17
Woman on Phone	.05	.42	20	2.05
Conference Room	.47	.004	31	3.10

* 1 = non-feminist content, 5 = pro-feminist content

Table 4

Mean Feminist Content of Stories by Non- and Pro-Feminist Males

Picture	Non-Feminist		Pro-Feminist
Female judge	2.44		2.64
Printer	1.64	*	2.62
Woman on phone	2.00		2.13
Conference room	2.63	**	3.60

*t = -2.00, df = 22, p = .058

**t = -4.06, df = 29, p < .0001

but this hypothesis was not supported. There was a trend, significant at less than the .10 level, toward pro-feminists attributing more traditional roles than non-feminists ($\chi^2 = 2.86$, df = 1).

Discussion

It appears that the sons of women employed in full-time professional positions are most likely to develop attitudes favorable to feminism, particularly as they grow older. The finding regarding maternal employment is consistent with previous research which has underscored the importance of mothers' contentment with their roles to their providing positive non-traditional models for their children (e.g., Gold and Andre, 1978). The finding that pro-feminist males were significantly older than non-feminist males is provocative, and to the author's knowledge has not been investigated previously. A similar phenomenon was found for the females in the larger study of which this was a part (Green, 1978); the mean age of feminist females was 23, and of non-feminists, 21.5. Research of a longitudinal nature is needed to aid in understanding the process by which feminist attitudes develop with increasing age for both sexes.

The results of the analysis of the thematic apperception test demonstrated that attitudes toward feminism do indeed play a part in the structuring of experience. That the figure of the printer was perceived as male more frequently by non-feminists lends credence to the notion of differential perception. The finding suggests that males with non-feminist attitudes are less likely, literally, to "see" women in non-traditional occupations.

The finding that pro-feminist males were more likely to cast the woman in the conference room into a stereotyped role appears at first glance to be contradictory to the previous finding. However, it is consistent with a surprising result of the larger study of women; feminist females were also more likely to describe women in traditional pictures in terms of stereotypes that were non-feminists. Green (1978) suggested that feminists are more conscious of such

stereotypes, which reflect their social reality. These findings of differential perceptions of women in traditional and non-traditional pictures by feminist and non-feminist males are intriguing, and worthy of further study.

The fact that no difference was found in the construction of social reality in response to two of the four pictures deserves special comment. The stories written about these pictures were coded for negative affect expressed toward the woman, whereas the stories previously discussed were coded on a dimension of content. It was expected that non-feminist males would express more hostility toward women in their social constructions than pro-feminist males, and this was clearly not the case. The results vividly demonstrate that feminist attitudes and hostility toward women represent independent dimensions for males, and that one does not necessarily predict the other.

Finally, it should be noted that males' stories were consistently less feminist in content than females' stories across all groups. Although no statistical comparisons were made between the males and the females in the larger study, the reader may be interested in comparing the following mean scores for feminist content of stories written by females to those for the males shown in Table 4 (1 = non-feminist, 5 = feminist).

	Mean Feminist Content for Females	
Picture	Non-feminists N=25	Feminist N=25
Judge	2.72	3.72
Printer	1.96	3.32
Phone	2.52	3.16
Conference Room	3.52	4.16

It is clear that the social construction of reality differs not only as a function of feminist attitudes, the present focus, but, not surprisingly, as a function of gender as well.

In conclusion, this study has demonstrated the value of the use of a thematic apperception technique to study the perceptions of the world by individuals who differ on an attitude toward feminism continuum. Further work is needed to delineate specific content dimensions on which feminist and non-feminist males differ.

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